



Lord of the Flies. Photo: Helen Maybanks

would need to call on local expertise. We also knew that we wanted to have learning throughout every layer of the project and so decided to appoint a national team of emerging community dance artists to find and recruit a diverse group of young people. These artists would become our 'Lord of the Flies Ambassadors' and they would become the most critical part of this huge project.

In the spring of 2013 we started the process of recruiting our ambassadors. We toured the country with our tour directors to interview and observe workshops. We were blown-away by the dedication of the artists we met many in the early stages of attempting to establish a career as a freelance artist.

After the initial recruitment period we started planning for our first Lord of the Flies Boot Camp. We knew we needed to teach repertoire, share our values for the project and network the ambassadors together in the hope they would provide each other with peer-to-peer support during the life of the project.

Our initial Boot Camp in September 2013 brought together a remarkable team of emerging artists passionate about developing talent in their region. Over the course of the week we immersed them in the production; our hopes and dreams for it and tried to give them as many skills, tricks and techniques as we could. We sent them

back to their regions with high hopes and high expectations.

Fast forward to now to the late spring of 2014. 108 boys and young men have appeared on stage alongside our professional dancers. Over 6,000 have participated in the wider outreach programme smashing our ambition to reach that many over the course of the entire year (we have eight venues left to go). We have reached into communities who have never experienced dance before and we have supported, mentored and encouraged artists, young people and audiences to trust us. I do appreciate that we have the strength of a well-known brand behind us, it's an utter privilege working for New Adventures but despite this existing 'step up' I have been personally impressed by audiences willingness to accept this piece of work.

I have many hopes and ambitions for Lord of the Flies but when pushed I try to simplify it all into three outcomes. Firstly to make a commercially viable piece of work for the large-scale that brings together professional and non-professional talent. Secondly for the work to be artistically outstanding and thirdly for the project to change young people's lives through dance. It's still too early to say as to whether we will achieve all of these ambitions but the early indications are looking encouraging.

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## Working in

Leading dance classes with vulnerable people in confidential settings such as refuges or criminal justice settings brings its own imposed limitations that can be challenging when trying to create a healthy learning space. Here, we've asked one experienced dance practitioner who works in these settings to share the signposts that she has found useful

### **My community dance practice uses long digested personal and professional experience to support participants in confidential settings.**

What drove me to work in this context was intuitively knowing that dance could be useful as part of a varied toolbox that nurtures reflection, self-belief and confidence in one's capacity to move beyond present circumstances.

Before you choose to work in confidential settings take the time to reflect upon why you believe this to be the right pathway for you. If upon reflection, this is still for you then make doubly sure you are a determined and resourceful person. It takes gentle and firm persistence to access settings, and then negotiate so you can deliver your offer. Next, accept that you will be working with partners who, usually, have little or no knowledge of dance beyond those images in the public realm and limited personal experience. As dancers we know about bodies, energy and space, we also know the added value and unique selling point of including some kind of dance practice when seeking nurtured positive-

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# confidential settings

outcome pathways in response to social inequalities and difficulties. Our partners may not. Always be as clear as possible as to what your offer is – remember, we are not social workers, we are dancers.

## **Signpost number one**

Fun, fun, fun. Those in confidential settings – whether professionals or service users – have enough on their plate. So, have and promote fun – the sheer joy we all recognise and resonate with when that exercise, phrase or use of breath is finally executed to our satisfaction. The exhilaration we feel when we are dancing, when we go beyond the steps and move. The delight we experience when we move in, sometimes, silly ways that assist us in accessing a new aspect of ourselves.

## **Signpost number two**

Be very aware that the exercises we process with ease – simple core strengthening, alignment, breath and stillness – may have completely different outcomes for participants. These outcomes can range from minor ill-health difficulties, withdrawing from participating to overconfidence and confusion. Access to research in physiology and the biological and somatic systems interfaces activated in the vulnerable would be an enormous help here.

Plan and make notes after each class. This is invaluable as it provides a narrative arc that reflects the participants and your own learning, which will help you to track and adjust your delivery. Personal qualities come into play here. I've found humour, gentle chatting, scrupulous word choice, music (which has an embedded positivity), sharing 'teacher' attention and 'teacher' getting it 'wrong' all encourage a healthy learning space.

## **Signpost number three**

Make sure that you are able to communicate complex notions in a straightforward manner to facilitate a healthy working relationship with setting professionals. This is essential from the initial organisational stages to the exit point. We have to be mindful that what we take for granted is new and unknown to others and our offer has to be appropriate for the setting.

We also have to 'know' the setting we wish to work in. What constraints or barriers are there? How does everyday use of the setting impact on our practice? Do I need to glean more information, and from where, in order to accept necessary limits imposed upon my working practice? Have I sufficiently nurtured a working relationship with setting professionals so that difficulties can be discussed and reflected upon in a positive and objective manner?

## **Signpost number four**

Listen. My delightful offspring bridle regularly against my stock phrase 'stop flapping your ears and listen'. Develop high functioning skills – listen to pauses, silences, repeated words, body language and gaze. Listen with your ears, eyes and energy - whole body listening. This is important, during class it may become clear that participants are more comfortable with stretching and reflective movement rather than 'fun dance'. Confidence and skill are needed to recognise and adjust to these subtle changes during class and in setting discussions with setting workers.

## **Signpost number five**

Accept difficulties and imposed limitations. Failure is part of the road to success. Most of us have a fond vision of delivering our community practice on a regular day, at a regular time, in a decent space with a healthy sprinkling

of participants with whom we feel confident we can fairly easily negotiate any difficulties that arise. This may not be the case. Class may be cancelled a couple of hours before starting; be spaced out over nine months, the space may be unsuitable, there may only be one or two participants, other people may be present and just want to watch. Negotiating some of the difficulties that arise may be beyond your remit. How are you going to react and then respond to these challenges? Do you have the skills required? If not, how are you going to acquire them?

## **Signpost number six**

Put in place support for yourself. From a dance mentor you can discuss movement issues with, to a setting professional participating in class, to regular downtime activity and always remember it is not your compassion that you are offering, it is your dance.

## **Signpost number seven**

How are you going to evaluate your offer? By following these signposts some answers have surfaced for me. Use current good practice models, e.g. local arts and health service providers, Willis Newson and his work at UWE, Manchester Metropolitan University, all have a wealth of information and guidance. And, of course, engage with setting professionals and the evaluation expertise they have.

Finally, remember our core skills as dancers: we know how to transpose, how to navigate a mass of instruction and information, how to keep searching, how to learn from mistakes others may not even notice, how to sustain clarity. Feel empowered by what you know.

This article has been published anonymously to respect the privacy of the author.